ARTICLE APPEARED
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THE WASHINGTON POST
21 November 1981

For Accused Spy, Bitter Hist

Murky Charges of Dramas Past

By Bill Peterson
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In the early 1950s, Louis Dolivet, a well-connected Frenchman who edited a liberal magazine in New York, was a small fish, a footnote in history only because he had been accused of being a communist spy.

He denied the charges, and they died quietly. He settled in Paris and began a new life.

But about 10 days ago the past again began to haunt Dolivet, now 74. The Sunday Times of London, he was told, intended to publish a story about charges he thought had been forgotten 30 years ago. Dolivet rushed to London, and obtained an injuction to keep the story from appearing.

The newspaper carried an almost irresistible headline the next day: "Our spy story is gagged."

The paper breathlessly hinted at a real potboiler: an international spy ring, "communist activists" with close ties to the White House and the United Nations," and a self-described Soviet agent close to the British royal family.

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That particular story may never see the light of day. The newspaper doesn't have evidence to prove that Dolivet was a spy, according to executive editor Don Berry. Instead, a second, less spectacular story is scheduled to be published this Sunday.

A second, unwitting player in the drama is Dolivet's former brother-in-law, Michael W. Straight, a former publisher of The New Republic and a former deputy chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Straight's name has frequently appeared in the British press since last spring when he revealed he was the man who years ago exposed eminent British art historian Anthony Blunt as a Soviet spy. Straight said he met Blunt in a group of student intellectuals at Cambridge during the 1930s, and Blunt later tried to recruit him as a Soviet agent.

Dolivet is a victim of a "competitive journalistic rat race," said Straight, who lives in Bethesda. "There is no linkage between Blunt and Dolivet."

Straight and Dolivet parted bitterly more than 30 years ago, and haven't spoken to each other since. Their story is worth repeating now only for what it says about a particular period in American history, and the British press' current infatuation with spy tales.

Dolivet is a nationalized French citizen with an elegant manner and a bizarre past. He came to the United States in 1940, founded a small magazine and, after a whirlwind courtship, married money and social position in the form of actress Beatrice Straight. He was an extremely handsome man, a gifted writer and an eloquent orator.

"He looked like Beethoven and was a fine speaker who impressed everyone he met," said Michael Straight. "He was filled with words about peace."

Dolivet was in demand as a writer and speaker. His articles appeared in liberal magazines such as The Nation and The New Republic. He spoke before groups such as the World Confederation of International Governments and the National Farm Institute.

He was founding editor of Free World, a magazine published in six languages that advocated such things as the establishment of the United Nations, a world court and an international police force. It had broad support among liberal intellectuals.

Among the names of writers and public figures listed on its masthead were John Gunther, Harold L. Ickes, Thomas Mann, Syngman Rhee and

Before he came to America, the Romanian-born Dolivet was involved with anti-fascist peace organizations in Europe with alleged communist ties. The names of these groups are largely forgotten today. According to one source, Dolivet was being watched by several intelligence agencies during that period. But nothing came of it.

One sign of U.S. interest in these pre-war activities appeared in a 1943 memo by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. "He said I was a very dangerous man," Dolivet said.

As an editor, Dolivet conducted a long correspondence with Vice President Henry Wallace. Dolivet's letters mainly were requests for articles and statements of endorsement from Wallace, which the vice president readily supplied.

According to Wallace's papers in the Library of Congress, he met privately with Dolivet on at least two occasions, and circulated a speech, "The Century of the Common Man," which Dolivet says he wrote for Wallace.

Dolivet says he also met with Harry Truman after he succeeded Wallace as vice president.

After the war, Dolivet continued to edit the magazine, which changed its name to U.N. World, and tried unsuccessfully to become a U.S. citizen on grounds of his 25 days of service in the Army. He also became a U.N. consultant.

By 1949, Dolivet's marriage had broken up and he was in trouble with some of the conservative businessmen who backed his magazine, partially because they thought it was soft on Soviet aggression.

That same year a mysterious witness charged before a Senate subcommittee that Dolivet was a liaison between communists and the U.N. Secretariat—a charge that acting U.N. Secretary General Byron Price called "the nuttiest story I ever heard."

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